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Criminal Profiles of Violent Juvenile Sex and Violent Juvenile Non-Sex Offenders

An Explorative Longitudinal Study

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Few studies have longitudinally investigated the criminal profiles of violent juvenile sex and violent juvenile non-sex offenders. To make up for this lack, this study used police records of juveniles to determine the nature of the criminal profiles of violent sex offenders ($n = 226$) and violent non-sex offenders ($n = 4,130$). All offenders committed their first offense in 1996 and were followed for 7 years. Results showed that violent sex offenders and violent non-sex offenders cannot be considered a homogeneous group because of different background characteristics and criminal profiles. Sex and violent offenses often constitute a small part of a broader criminal pattern. Further research is necessary to reveal in more detail the developmental and criminological patterns of violent and sexual delinquency. Treatment and intervention programs may benefit from this.

Keywords: *juvenile sex offenders; comparative study; criminal profiles; longitudinal*

One of the controversies with respect to juvenile sex offenders is whether they are similar to non-sex offenders. This issue has substantial clinical relevance: Similarity between the two groups suggests that treatment programs to a large extent may be the same, whereas dissimilarity would support the development of offender-specific treatment programs

aimed at specific aspects of each group. One of the issues in this discussion is whether the criminal behaviors of juvenile sex offenders and non-sex offenders are substantially different.

Several studies have demonstrated differences between sex offenders and non-sex offenders. A recurrent finding is the presence of a history of sexual and/or physical abuse, which has been demonstrated more frequently in sex offenders compared with non-sex offenders (Fagan & Wexler, 1988; Hastings, Anderson, & Hemphill, 1997; Jonson-Reid & Way, 2001; Milloy, 1994). Mixed results have been demonstrated with respect to other characteristics (e.g., psychopathology and ethnicity: Blaske, Borduin, Henggeler, & Mann, 1989; Davis & Leitenberg, 1987; Herkov, Gynther, Thomas, & Myers, 1996; Oliver, Hall, & Neuhaus, 1993). A number of studies have suggested that juvenile sex offenders are similar to non-sex offenders with respect to personality, history of antisocial behavior, cognitive capacities, and family characteristics (Becker & Hunter, 1997; Butler & Seto, 2002; Jacobs, Kennedy, & Meyer, 1997; Lewis, Shanok, & Pincus, 1979; Miner & Crimmins, 1995; Spaccarelli, Bowden, Coatsworth, & Kim, 1997; Truscott, 1993).

One important aspect that may interfere when comparing sex offenders with non-sex offenders is the heterogeneity of the sex offender group. Beckett (1999) stated that youngsters who molest children (at least 4 to 5 years younger than the perpetrator) and youngsters who rape or sexually assault peers or adult women are too often considered a single (homogeneous) group. This may result in possible differences between subtypes of sex offenders going unnoticed. Studies comparing juvenile child molesters with juvenile rapists of peers and/or adult women have demonstrated substantial differences between these two groups (e.g., Hendriks & Bijleveld, 2004a; Hsu & Starzynski, 1990; Hunter, Hazelwood, & Slesinger, 2000; Hunter, Figueredo, Malamuth, & Becker, 2003; Van Wijk, 1999). Compared to rapists, child molesters were found to exhibit more inadequate social behavior and appeared more socially isolated (Hsu & Starzynski, 1990; Van Wijk, 1999; Van Wijk, van Horn, Bullens, Bijleveld, & Doreleijers, 2005). Child molesters also report having been the victim of sexual abuse more often than rapists (Ford & Linney, 1995; Worling, 1995). Another finding is that although levels of internalizing problems may be higher in child molesters, rapists may experience higher levels of externalizing problem behavior (Becker & Hunter, 1997; Carpenter, Peed, & Eastman, 1995; Katz, 1990). With respect to criminal outcome, studies in adult sex offenders have shown that rapists reoffend more often by committing a nonsexual crime than do child molesters (Hanson & Bussière, 1998; Lussier, 2005; Quinsey, Rise, & Harris,

1995). Recently Waite et al. (2005) found the same for juvenile sex offenders. For these reasons, it may be concluded that evidence supports the existence of distinct groups of juvenile sex offenders (i.e., child molesters on the one hand and rapists on the other). An assumption may be that rapists are more likely than child molesters to resemble non-sex offenders, particularly violent offenders.

The comparison of juvenile sex offenders with non-sex offenders may also be influenced by the fact that many sex offenders have a history of (nonsexual) antisocial behavior (Fehrenbach, Smith, Monastersky, & Deisher, 1986; Ryan, Miyoshi, Metzner, Krugman, & Fryer, 1996). Elliott (as cited in Righthand & Welch, 2001) found that only few (7%) of a group of 80 juvenile sexual offenders had committed sex offenses exclusively, with the rest having also perpetrated nonsexual assaults. Nonsexual antisocial behavior may occur most often in sexual offenders who engage in forcible sexual assaults, such as rape and attempted rape (Righthand & Welch, 2001). This finding may indicate that sex offenses, in particular rape and attempted rape, constitute a part of a more extensive criminal career (Carpenter et al., 1995; Milloy, 1994; Van Wijk & Ferwerda, 2000).

A review of the literature has shown that the majority of studies comparing sex offenders and non-sex offenders used a cross-sectional design (Van Wijk, Vermeiren, et al., 2006). Exceptions were three prospective studies (Hagan, Gust-Brey, Cho, & Dow, 2001; Rubinstein, Yeager, Goodstein, & Lewis, 1993; Sipe, Jensen, & Everett, 1998) in which juvenile offenders were followed into adulthood and one prospective population-based study (Van Wijk, Loeber, et al., 2005) in which juveniles, parents, and teachers were interviewed longitudinally. The prospective study of Hagan et al. (2001) concluded that sex offenders were more likely to sexually reoffend than non-sex offenders (Hagan et al., 2001). Rubinstein et al. (1993) showed that a group of extremely violent sex offenders had more criminal records as adults compared with non-sex offenders, whereas Sipe et al. (1998) found that sex offenders had lower rates of nonsexual crimes as adults than non-sex offenders. Van Wijk, Loeber, et al. (2005) came to the conclusion that violent sex offenders had a history of violent delinquent behavior, comparable with that of violent non-sex offenders.

This longitudinal study aims at investigating criminal profiles of juvenile violent sex offenders and juvenile violent non-sex offenders who committed their first offense in 1996. Participants were followed up to 2002, a follow-up period of 7 years. This study addresses the following questions: (a) What are the sociodemographic and offense characteristics of violent sex and violent non-sex offenders, and (b) what is the pattern of offenses in each of the groups over a 7-year follow-up (1996-2002) after the first offense?

Method

Target Population

Approximately 58,000 juveniles are arrested annually by the Dutch police (Van der Heide & Eggen, 2005). All 25 Dutch police regions use an identical registration system for offenders, the HKS (Recognition System for the Police). For each registered offender, characteristics such as age, nationality, place of residence, and all (past) criminal activities of the suspects can be found. This database does not contain information regarding convictions. All juvenile offenders in this study had to be considered as suspects. When the district attorney disagrees with the police as to the guilt of the suspect, his or her name must be removed from the HKS. Since 1996, a special police unit, the National Crime Information Unit, has been collecting the HKS data from all 25 police regions to develop a national crime chart. Earlier research has shown that HKS data are suitable for scientific research (Bijleveld, Meijers, & Prins, 2000).

In The Netherlands, children under the age of 12 are not considered criminally responsible. Specific legislation for minors (the juvenile penal code) applies to youngsters aged 12 to 18 years. In youngsters with a mental or emotional developmental deficiency, application of this juvenile code can be extended until the age of 21. For crimes committed when the youngster is 16 to 18 years old, a waiver can be obtained, which may result in prosecution of the minor as an adult.

Procedure

For this study, police records of all juvenile delinquents in the Netherlands between 1996 and 2002 were used. From the total file, a subgroup with the following criteria was selected:

1. Registered on suspicion with an offense in 1996. This can also be *another* offense than a violent sex or a violent offense. We will specifically consider violent sex or violent offenses as the *index offenses* in our population. This rule does not exclude other offenses committed before the index offenses.
2. An important criterion is that the index offense must have been committed between ages 12 and 18 years.
3. A youngster is considered a violent sex offender (VSO) when he has committed a violent sex offense first (index offense) before a *possibly* violent offense later on. For the group of violent offenders (VOs), it is the other way around. For instance, when a juvenile first rapes a female person and then

commits a violent offense, he is considered to be a VSO. When he first commits a violent offense and then a sex offense, he is considered a VO.

4. We have included all VSOs ($n = 226$) and VOs ($n = 4,130$) who fit the above-mentioned criteria.
5. Apart from violent sex and non-sex offenses, other types of offenses were included to formulate the complete criminal profiles of the offenders.

For statistical analyses, the following groups of offenses were distinguished in accordance with the crimes as mentioned in the Penal Code of the Netherlands:

1. Violent sex offenses (rape, sexual assault).
2. Other sex offenses (exhibitionism, child molesting).
3. Violent offenses (manslaughter, murder, assault, group violence).
4. Property offenses (with violence; street robbery).
5. Property offenses (without violence; breaking and entering, theft).
6. Vandalism/public order offenses.
7. Traffic offenses.
8. Drug crimes.
9. Other offenses.

Results

Sociodemographic and Offense Characteristics of the Youngsters

The group of VSOs consisted of significantly more male persons than female persons, compared to the VOs, and had more often a non-Dutch background than VOs. VSOs committed their first offenses at a younger age than VOs. The average age at the time of the most recent offense, the average duration of their criminal career, and the average number of offenses committed did not significantly differ between the two groups (see Table 1).

Criminal Career of VSOs

Figure 1 should be read as follows: The broken line is the *index offense*: a violent sex offense ($N = 226$). The solid lines represent offenses before and/or after the index offense, which may be all other types of offenses. The vertical figures (Y-axis) represent the number of offenders; the horizontal figures (X-axis) represent the order of offenses in relation to the index offense. This figure shows that VSOs—in relation to the total number of

Table 1
Sociodemographic and Offense Characteristics

Characteristic	Violent Sex Offenders (VSOs) (<i>N</i> = 226)	Violent Offenders (VOs) (<i>N</i> = 4,130)	χ^2 (<i>df</i>)
Male offenders	99.6%	84.9%	37.358 (1), <i>p</i> = .000
Ethnic minorities	46.0%	25.4%	46.938 (1), <i>p</i> = .000
<i>t</i> test			
Mean age first offense (in years, 1996)	15.1 (<i>SD</i> = 1.5)	15.4 (<i>SD</i> = 1.4)	<i>t</i> = -3.024, <i>p</i> = .003
Mean age most recent offense (in years)	17.6 (<i>SD</i> = 2.5)	18.0 (<i>SD</i> = 2.5)	<i>t</i> = -1.900, <i>p</i> = .057
Mean duration criminal career (in years)	2.5 (<i>SD</i> = 2.3)	2.6 (<i>SD</i> = 2.3)	<i>t</i> = -.112, <i>p</i> = .911
Mean number of offenses	7.6 (<i>SD</i> = 8.1)	7.7 (<i>SD</i> = 10.4)	<i>t</i> = -.183, <i>p</i> = .855

Figure 1
Number of Sex Offenders and Their (Sex) Offenses

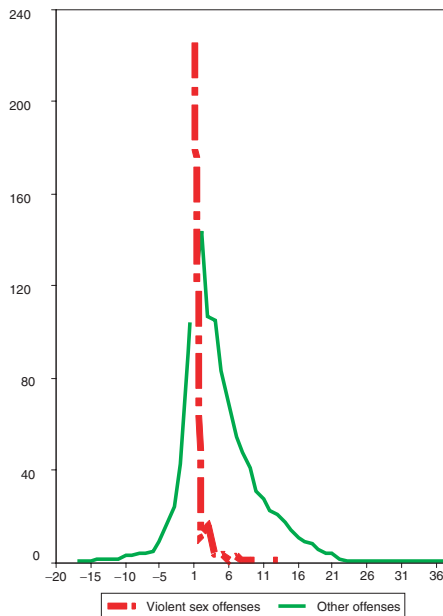


Table 2
Number and Types of Offenses Committed by Violent Sex Offenders
Before and After the Index Crime

Offense Category	Offenses Before Index Offense (<i>n</i> = 91)	Violent Sex Offense (<i>n</i> = 226)	Offenses After Index Offense (<i>n</i> = 156)	Total Number of Offenses
Violent sex offenses	0 (0%)	226 (84%)	43 (16%)	269 (20%)
Other sex offenses	48 (47%)	0 (0%)	54 (53%)	102 (8%)
Violent offenses	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	123 (100%)	123 (9%)
Violent property offenses	19 (17%)	0 (0%)	96 (83%)	115 (9%)
Nonviolent property offenses	116 (25%)	0 (0%)	357 (75%)	473 (36%)
Vandalism/public order offenses	25 (15%)	0 (0%)	137 (85%)	162 (12%)
Traffic offenses	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	31 (97%)	32 (2%)
Drug crimes	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	13 (100%)	13 (1%)
Other offenses	5 (12%)	0 (0%)	36 (88%)	41 (3%)
Total	214 (16%)	226 (17%)	890 (67%)	1,330 (100%)

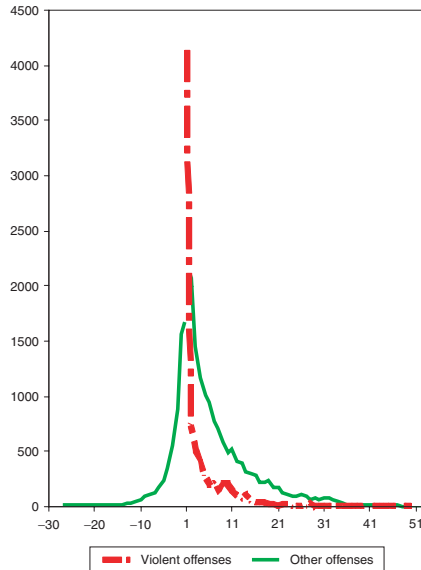
offenses committed—are not often registered for offenses *before* the violent sex index offense. *After* the violent sex index offense, relatively more offenses were reported. *Violent sex offenses* are mainly restricted to the index offense. In other words, to a large extent, violent sex offenses seem to be once-only events.

Table 2 elaborates on Figure 1. In the left column, there are specific offense categories. The upper row tabulates the offenses preceding the index offense, the index offense, the offenses following the index offense, and the total number of offenses, respectively. Because a violent sex offense was the index offense ($N = 226$), no juvenile delinquents committed a violent sex offense *before* the index offense. After the index offense, a total of 43 violent sex offenses were committed. This is 16% of all violent sex offenses including the index offense committed by the 226 VSOs.

In total, the group of 226 VSOs committed at least 1,330 offenses. Two thirds of these offenses were committed after the index offense by a group of 156 sex offenders and consisted to a large extent of nonviolent property offenses.

In the total criminal profile, nonviolent property offenses were the most frequently committed offenses (36%), followed by violent sex offenses (20%). Concerning this group of VSOs, it is remarkable that nonsexual violence constituted “only” 9% of all offenses committed, and these crimes were all committed after the index offense. The results also showed that other nonviolent sex offenses (8% of all offenses) were committed, both before and after the violent sex offense.

Figure 2
Number of Violent Offenders and Their (Violent) Offenses



Criminal Career of Violent Non-Sex Offenders

Figure 2 shows results in a comparable way as with VSOs. The criminality pattern is similar to that of the VSOs: VOs were hardly registered for offenses *before* the violent index offense. *After* the violent index offense, there are relatively more offenses. *Violent* offenses are mainly restricted to the index offense. Of course, this does not exclude a large variety of other offenses from the criminal career of this specific violent group (as shown in Table 3).

Table 3 shows more detailed information about the criminal career of VOs. In total, the group of 4,130 VOs committed at least 26,183 offenses. As was the case with the VSOs, two thirds of these offenses were committed after the index offense and consisted to a large extent of nonviolent property offenses, followed by violent offenses. By definition, violent offenses did not occur before the index offense; after the index offense, violent offenses occurred 3,857 times. The proportion of violent offenses after

Table 3
Number and Types of Offenses Committed by Violent Offenders
Before and After the Index Crime

Offense Category	Offenses Before Index Offense (<i>n</i> = 1,568)	Violent Offense (<i>n</i> = 4,130)	Offenses After Index Offense (<i>n</i> = 2,778)	Total Number of Offenses
Violent sex offenses	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	92 (100%)	92 (< 1%)
Other sex offenses	22 (24%)	0 (0%)	69 (76%)	91 (< 1%)
Violent offenses	0 (0%)	4,130 (52%)	3,857 (48%)	7,987 (31%)
Violent property offenses	254 (16%)	0 (0%)	1,330 (84%)	1,584 (6%)
Nonviolent property offenses	2,433 (27%)	0 (0%)	6,644 (73%)	9,077 (35%)
Vandalism/public order offenses	1,292 (28%)	0 (0%)	3,324 (72%)	4,616 (18%)
Traffic offenses	110 (12%)	0 (0%)	823 (88%)	933 (4%)
Drug crimes	10 (3%)	0 (0%)	358 (97%)	368 (1%)
Other offenses	289 (20%)	0 (0%)	1,146 (80%)	1,435 (5%)
Total	4,410 (17%)	4,130 (16%)	17,643 (67%)	26,183 (100%)

the (violent) index offense was approximately the same (52% index offense; 48% after index). This is a remarkable distinction, compared to the index violent sex offense in the VSOs (84% index offense; 16% after index). Another important finding is that very few VO committed violent sex offenses (< 1%).

Discussion

In this study, the criminal profiles of VSOs and VO were described longitudinally (1996-2002), making use of police records collected over a period of 7 years. The mean duration of the juveniles' criminal career was approximately 2.5 years for both groups. It appeared that VSOs and VO must be considered as distinct groups regarding their background characteristics and criminal profiles. Youngsters who commit nonsexual violent crimes will hardly ever perpetrate sexual offenses after the index offense. On the other hand, only a limited number of VSOs commit violent offenses after the index offense. Another important finding was that a small number of female offenders can be found in the VO group, whereas this is not so for the VSO group.

In this study it was found that VSOs were younger at first arrest than VOs, although the difference was quite small in exact numbers. The mean age of 15 years for the VSO group was similar to the age found in other studies (e.g., Ford & Linney, 1995; Hunter et al., 2003; Vinogradov, Dishotsky, Doty, & Tinklenberg, 1988). These findings may reflect an earlier onset of VSOs compared with VOs. Also, because VSOs are considered more severe and inappropriate than VOs, youngsters in the VSO group may have a higher likelihood of being reported to police. Further research is necessary to verify this finding in other samples. In the VSO group, offenders were more often from ethnic minority groups. This is in line with other longitudinal studies showing that compared with Caucasians, Black offenders more often engaged in serious delinquent behavior (Loeber & Farrington, 1998). With regard to sex offenses, it may be important to distinguish between types of offenders (e.g., Beckett, 1999; Hunter et al., 2003). In a large Dutch, nationwide study—also based on police records (HKS)—it was found that Dutch (White) offenders perpetrated more sex offenses against children and displayed more indecent exposure, whereas ethnic minorities committed more rape and sexual assault (Van Wijk, Mali, Bullens, & Prins, 2006). The reason for this may lie in different arousal systems, because Murphy, DiLillo, Haynes, and Steere (2001) found that Caucasian individuals tended to show more arousal to sexual stimuli during laboratory assessments than African American individuals. However, differential selection mechanisms for ethnic minorities and Caucasians may also be in vogue, because Ryan et al. (1996) found that ethnicity was not different from the general population across all types of intervention and/or treatment settings. Further research should verify these findings.

Besides some important differences between the offender groups, similar patterns in the criminal careers of both groups also emerged. First of all, most VSOs as well as VOs were first registered for a rather serious offense. The stepping stone theory, the development from less serious to more serious delinquent acts, did not appear to characterize the population of this study. This finding is not in line with Elliott (1994), who found that rape is an end point that follows earlier delinquent, usually nonsexual violent behavior patterns (see also Loeber & Farrington, 1998). A plausible explanation for this difference can be that the youngsters in this study committed minor offenses that went unnoticed by the police (see also Longo & Groth, 1983; Ryan, 1997). Second, after their first arrest, VSOs and VOs shifted their attention to some extent from sex offenses and violent acts to (nonviolent) property crimes. About one third of the juveniles in both groups eventually committed (nonviolent) property offenses. Several explanations

can be put forth for these results. The offenders may have been punished for their serious offenses or received special treatment, as a result of which they turned their attention to offenses with a lower risk of apprehension and (severe) sanctions. They may have become more rational in their delinquent behavior. Studies of recidivism among sex offenders revealed that most sex offenders recidivated by committing a nonsexual offense (e.g., Hendriks & Bijleveld, 2004b; Långström, 2002; Waite et al., 2005).

In line with the previous findings, VSOs and VOs could also be the consequence of the juveniles' "group" behavior. Many youngsters commit their offenses with other group members (Beke, Van Wijk, & Ferwerda, 2000; Warr, 2002), and violence and sex offenses can be a group act. Looije, Bijleveld, Weerman, and Hendriks (2004) found that about one third of the sex offenses perpetrated by juveniles were committed within a group. In almost all cases, the victim was a peer. Although status and prestige are important motives for youngsters—as part of the peer group—to rebel against societal rules, material benefits can become more important later in life. Further research is necessary to verify the hypotheses that juvenile VSOs and VOs operate in groups and that their motives for committing offenses can change over time, with a different criminal profile as a consequence. In this case, the emphasis with regard to the etiology of sexual offending would be placed more on group processes than on adverse family conditions.

The finding that many VSOs and VOs in the end became property offenders puts the definition of sex (and also violent) offenders into question. We initially regarded juveniles as sex offenders in our population if they had a police record for a sex offense before adulthood and started offending in general in 1996. Given their criminal career, the classification of (specific) *sex* offender seems to be incorrect in most of the cases. A large majority of them will stop after their first registration as a *sex offender*. Of the remaining group, the majority displayed a broad range of delinquent behavior, in particular property crimes. Consequently, many VSOs are essentially juvenile offenders more than they are essentially sex offenders.

However, it is likely that a subset of sex offenders is highly sexually deviant and violent and will continue their criminal career committing more and violent sex offenses (see also Rubinstein et al., 1993). Future research should focus on the developmental pathways toward sexual offending. Samples should be drawn within the normal population as police records in the Netherlands do not contain information of delinquent behavior before the age of 12 years.

A few limitations of this study also need to be mentioned. First, official records do not account for all violent sex and violent crimes committed. Only a limited number of those offenses are being reported to the police. Omissions in reporting sex crimes are very common (Abel et al., 1987; Russell, 1984; White & Koss, 1993). For that reason, findings should not be generalized to other samples, where findings are not based on official records. Second, this population of offenders consisted of suspects (though serious). It is possible that the judge will acquit the offender of the charge at the trial. Third, the use of police data can lead to an overestimation of the seriousness of the offenses. Fourth, the HKS system of the police was not originally constructed for scientific research purposes but for tracing crimes and criminals.

The strength of this study is its longitudinal research design, covering 7 years, and the relatively large number of VSOs and VOs. In-depth longitudinal and particularly inter- and intracultural research is needed to explore the differences between the groups in more detail. This is of clinical and legal interest. Besides the cost aspect of specific treatment trajectories, the absence of relevant differences between VSOs and VOs can also help the judicial authorities in determining suitable interventions for juvenile sex offenders. The number of specific treatment facilities and approaches is still growing, although their efficacy is not always clear. If further research reveals significant differences between different types of sex offenders and non-sex offenders, this can lead to more differentiated and effective diagnostics and treatment.

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